DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 030 880 AL 002 019

By-Nadler, Harvey

Criteria for the Selection of ESOL Materials.

Pub Date Mar 69

Note-14p.; Paper presented at the Third Annual TESOL Convention, Chicago, Illinois, March 5-8, 1969.

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.80

Descriptors-*English (Second Language), *Evaluation Criteria, Grammar, Instructional Materials, Language Learning Levels, Language Proficiency, Language Skills, Pattern Drills (Language), Pronunciation Instruction, Reading Materials, *Textbook Evaluation, Vocabulary

The author discusses the criteria to be considered in evaluating textbooks for classes of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). They are: (1) the age and proficiency level of the students; (2) the amount of time allotted for ESOL classes; (3) the treatment of the four language skills and all subject areas; (4) gradation and presentation of grammar, vocabulary and reading, pronunciation, and visual aids; and (5) the amount of practice drills provided. He warns that "the textbook that deals with form, syntax, and function without treating meaning fails both the student and the teacher." He concludes that any textbook is only as good as the teacher using it. (DO)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED030880

Criteria for the Selection of ESOL Materials

by Harvey Nadler

Introduction

If you accept William F. Mackey's statement that "if teaching is a full-time occupation, so is the preparation of materials," [1] and if you are a classroom teacher, then the textbooks that you select or have handed down to you by a department chairman play a major role in your daily school life. The better the textbook, the less supplementary material you will have to prepare for your class. But how do you recognize a good textbook? What should it contain? What should it avoid?

Before answering these questions and raising others, permit me to refresh your memories of Edward B. Anthony's definitions of "Approach, Method, and Technique," [2] wherein approach is described as axiomatic (representing a philosophy of the nature of language); method as procedural (dependent upon such variables as student age, cultural background, English language proficiency, the goal of the course, the place of English in the overall curriculum, and the time available for learning); and technique as implementational (reflecting the variety of tricks, contrivances and strategies the teacher uses to achieve an immediate objective). Thus, "the techniques carry out a method which is consistent with an approach," [3] and if these definitions are acceptable then the "textbooks ought to be written within methodological limitations." [4]

AL 002 019

Assuming that most TESOLs present would consider a kind of eclectic, pseudo-audio-lingual approach the soundest, the remarks which follow will use that approach as a base to build on. The modifier pseudo was employed solely to ensure that no one present would assume that the term audio-lingual was intended to exclude reading and/or writing, and eclectic was used to permit a grammatical orientation without reference to a contrastive analysis, which might prove valueless with a multilingual class, or to include any other methodology not usually considered standard aural-oral, or to exclude such methods as mim-mem if so desired - provided the methods remain consistent with the approach.

What then are the criteria to be considered in evaluating textbooks?

The Criteria

A. Level: The primary criterion in such an evaluation is the level of students for whom it is intended. Consideration of level should involve at least two major features - the age of the students and their level of English proficiency.

1. Age: Regardless of the age of the student, the structural (grammatical) component should be the same, for without control of the basic structural patterns in the language, all the lexical items in the dictionary are worthless. ("The linguistic student should never make the mistake of identifying a language with its dictionary.") [5] It is in the semantic component that the difference between the younger and the more mature learners can be incorporated into the text, for the content designed for more mature learners should reflect their in-

terest levels, which, undoubtedly, are quite different from say primary grade students. Getting a group of teenagers interested in talking and later reading about a "pussy cat" and a "bunny rabbit" would be rather difficult for even the most effective teacher...unless, of course, you were using special referents for pussy cat and bunny rabbit.

2. Proficiency: Just as important as the age level of the student is the amount of English which the students have already acquired. The teacher who is teaching a group of students exactly what they already happen to know is in for a frustrating experience, especially if other textbooks are unavailable to her. Please note a distinction between what students know (in the sense of can use with accuracy) and what students think they know, or know about the language.

Similarly frustrated is the teacher trying to teach a group of students who are supposed to have a prior knowledge of English and definite control over certain grammatical structures and a corpus of vocabulary, but don't. She has no starting point and nothing to build on.

The teacher confronted with a class of twenty-two students at three distinctly different levels of proficiency is no less exasperated, despite the possibility of setting up groups within the classroom. Most textbooks do not provide material for more than one level of proficiency at a time, despite what the prefaces may say about for whom the book is intended, - which raises the question: Does the book do what it purports to?

Realizing that the instruments available for proficiency testing

leave much to be desired (especially for elementary school children), we must insist that classes be grouped according to relative proficiency. Educational systems owe that debt to their teachers, and to the systems themselves, for it can aid the system in selecting appropriate texts for each level and in seeing to it that a built in articulation exists from level to level. Placement testing must be refined to the point where it can, for each school situation, do the job as needed.

Now that we have textbooks suitable for the age and proficiency level of the students, there are other criteria to consider: skills, subject matter, and the time available for ESOL classes.

B. Time: If the time allotted to ESOL classes continues to be limited to one 40 or 45 minute period as it is in many systems, the remainder of the students' hours spent in the mainstream with (perhaps) "slow" American students in history, science, mathematics, and what-have-you, then we can anticipate a continual spiral, downward, for all non-native speakers in our schools. The real surprise is that there are students who do manage to succeed within this time allotment. Students who are in a beginning level should be given a minimum of 2½ to 3 hours daily, intensively, and be permitted to go into the mainstream only after accuracy and fluency are achieved in a meaningful ratio - the Dade County "independent" rating, for example.

C. Skills and Subject Matter: When talking about a language we cannot limit ourselves to a consideration of the sound system of the language;

nor can we limit ourselves to the grammar. Language is a total communication system involving at least four basic skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - and a good textbook must provide the student with an opportunity for growth in each skill area.

The media for working on skill growth are the traditional subject areas of language: grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary development, reading, and composition. Each subject area must be developed; each can provide an opportunity for development of all of the linguistic skills which are involved in the acquisition of language. To the extent that any textbook omits any of the subject areas, the teacher must provide it, either from a supplementary text or from materials prepared by her.

Similarly, practice must be provided in each of the skill areas moving generally from the relatively receptive skill (listening - which, however, does require active participation, for the student must not only recognize but understand as well) to the most productive skills, speaking and writing.

Working with a grammatical structure, we can illustrate how each of the skills can be developed. The student will be asked to listen to the new structure (perhaps in contrast to a previously learned one). He may then be asked to distinguish between them before repeating the new one. He might next be asked to respond to a question containing the new structure (listening and speaking), before being shown the pattern in print or on the blackboard, where he can probably read it

if it contains familiar vocabulary. When he writes that sentence and similar ones for homework that night, providing review, and reenforcing what he has learned in class, he will have completed the cycle involving the four skills in one subject area. (Naturally, the writing could be done in class as well.)

D. Content: Mackey says that consistent with any approach, there must be selection, gradation, presentation, and repetition. [6] As textbook evaluators, however, there is no opportunity for you to select the material or to provide for a continuity or articulation within a graded hierarchy - hopefully, this has already been done by the author. You are constrained, however, to seek out and understand what the author has selected and why, and to ask yourself whether this material is suitable for the age, interest, and proficiency level of your students. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon you to determine what hierarchy has been built into the material: it should proceed from the simple to the complex, the concrete to the abstract, the receptive to the productive, and build upon the known to teach the unknown. If the textbook does not fulfill all of these requirements, you will find yourself forced to be augmenter, supplementer, innovator, and provider in addition to classroom teacher.

In seting up these gradations, the author should, for example, teach "The boy is late." before "The boy is going to be late." The reverse would have the teacher teaching the more complex (if only in length of utterance) is going to (be) before is, which is contained

therein, and should be used as the known when teaching the unknown <u>is going to</u>.

The good text should also introduce concrete nouns, especially the available vocabulary, those objects in the classroom and on or of the student, before introducing such abstract concepts as "honesty" and "loyalty."

The textbook should not assume that the student can write a three paragraph theme when it would be much more appropriate to have the students practice paragraph writing first.

1. <u>Presentation</u>: The textbooks most consistent with an audio-lingual approach would probably remain closed for most of the class hour, for an orientation to spoken rather than written language would be a primary consideration, and that language should be presented without the students' burying their faces in the text. Most classroom activity should be oral for students of relatively little proficiency, who will, however, use an open book for reading activities.

As proficiency increases the amount of emphasis on oral activity should decrease but by this we do not mean <u>disappear</u>. The good textbook should mirror the students' need for increased activity in various skills at specific stages of language study - but not lose track of the fact that all of the subject areas must continue to be taught and that growth in each skill must proceed as well. Building from individual units into wholes rather than breaking wholes down into units provides the student with the security he needs to enable him to handle with confidence the larger wholes.

a. Grammar: Since the forms and their arrangement in a language carry meaning beyond the lexical content, the hierarchy of grammatical structures is the essential ingredient in any text for non-native speakers. There is no reason to introduce students to problems of place, manner, and time adverbials if they have not learned to control the S-V-O pattern which must occur in conjunction with those adverbials.

For the beginning student, it would seem unnecessary to devote attention to deep structure; rather, emphasis should be given to providing the beginner with a corpus of basic structure and vocabulary so that he has a base from which to generate. The distinction between, and the importance of, deep and surface structural relationships can well be deferred to the intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency, that often no-man's land where the unfinished bridge looms large for the teacher and textbook-writer alike.

However, not teaching deep structure does not suggest ignoring it completely. If the sentences generated with the copula are in fact different from those using other verbal types, then they should be kept separate from them, and the textbook writer should see to it that they are introduced and taught as different items.

b. Vocabulary and Reading: Vocabulary should be introduced in contexts, whether these contexts are isolated sentences, designed to help the low-level-proficiency student understand the meaning of the new lexical item, or paragraph or story units for students of greater proficiency, who will

be able to understand the new words from the context, or are capable of using an all-English dictionary, and are aware of the multiple listings they will find therein. The density of new words should, therefore, be limited if the student is not to become frustrated. Naturally, a glossary of "new" words can be included in footnotes or at the end of the book, although, as often as not, the truly new word is the one word that has not been glossed. Vocabulary should most definitely reflect the interest level of the student if not the level of intelletual maturity, for the student's linguistic maturity lags far behind his interest and involvement in discussing current topics of interest.

Within the framework of a reading selection, there should be a distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary. The vocabulary intended for productive acquisition by the student should be highlighted in the various exercises that follow the reading selection. Vocabulary can be made productive by removing it from strict manipulation in the same context of the reading selection, and placing it in context which relate to the students' life and interests (but without introducing other meanings of the lexical unit).

c. Pronunciation: The more phonemic transcription contained in the text, the greater the probability that you will be forced to teach your students a phonemic system, adding still another item to the many that you already must teach. Most of the time, standard orthography can be patterned to illustrate sound/spelling relationships, and since you are proceeding from the spoken to the written form, sufficient practice should preclude the possibility of gross student errors in pronunciation. Naturally, all pronunciation problems that will affect structural meaning (such as inflections) must be taught prior to or concurrently

with that phase of the grammar.

D. Visual Aids: Be sure that the pictures you use are simple and clear in meaning. Two students from different cultures may look at the same picture and find different meanings in what they see.

Aside from the occasional picture of a concrete object for student reference, most visual aids should be extra-textual so that student attention can be focused on the teacher, the blackboard, or that wall chart in the front of the room. Remember, you do not want their faces buried in their books.

2. Practice: Even the textbook that has fulfilled all of these criteria is worthless if it does not provide a sufficient number of exercises and drill material to help the student achieve mastery of the content. Exposure is not enough. The student must be manipulated with drill until he learns to manipulate the material to the extent that he can and will use it (whether it be structure or lexicon) in communication situations. He cannot "study" by himself. On the contrary, he requires a constant teacher-model giving him practice on the grammatical patterns, the new lexical items, the individual sounds and clusters, the stress, pitch, and juncture patterns (although many of these pronunciation problems can be handled within the grammatical and lexical frameworks).

For students at the lower range of proficiency, pattern practices should be available in profusion. They should revolve around the question pattern so that, insofar as possible, the student is functioning within a communication situation of question and response. The pattern practice exercises should be designed carefully to give the student control of

analogous constructions, the grammatical patterns which can be generalized, built-in selectional restrictions on lexicon, and continuous opportunity to reinforce what has already been taught. (The teacher must, of course, exhibit restraint because she will tire of these drills long before the spark of interest has left her students' eyes.)

The patterns should be illustrated and summarized so that the student can refer to them at home to refresh his memory of what he practiced in class. Patterns should be contrasted in charts so that students can see at a glance the differences and similarities between (or among) them.

Reading selections should be used for both intensive and extensive purposes. Intensive activities would include line-by-line questions which could be answered directly by sentences from the text; syononym and antonym drills, vocabulary fill-ins, and word forms, all in the context of the reading selection.

Extensive activities would include questions for general comprehension of paragraphs or larger units of the reading selection and word study utilizing new vocabulary in contexts related to student interests.

Writing activities should proceed from model paragraphs to longer models (compositions and themes), providing outline guides and key questions to help the student write his own composition on a similar topic. This, naturally, would be reinforced by teacher-guided attempts at creating oral compositions, during which the teacher and other students would help the student find the occasional word he needs to complete a thought. But this kind of model composition approach should not be merely a series

of sentences placed one after another. The model, if well-conceived, will provide the student with the type of connective-tissue style (especially transition and sequence words) that he will need to move from the spoken language to the written language.

Supplementary tapes can be used to great advantage when a language laboratory is available, but primarily for the purpose of aural comprehension - not active repetition, unless a tutor is available (on a one-to-one basis) for immediate correction and knows what to correct and how to make the correction.

Concluding Remarks: In the deep structure of any textbook, however, should be the inherent knowledge that language is not merely a series of drills for manipulation. Somewhere, at some time, as soon as possible, NOW - that language must shift from gamesmanship to a realistic tool of communication, and the textbook that deals with form, syntax, and function without treating meaning fails both the student and the teacher.

The text should provide opportunities for the student to perform in productive as well as receptive type drills. Filling in blank spaces well proves only that the student can fill in blank spaces. It tells nothing about how the student will function in a real-life language confrontation. The text should provide meaningful questions, within the framework of what the student has studied, for the student's response. At all levels beyond the primary grades, all of the skill areas should be worked on in succession.

Negative examples should not appear in any but the most advanced texts, for the student, if he sees something in print, will assume its correctness no matter how many verbal denials come from the teacher.

And finally, the teacher, who is an important part of any textbook, for the text can only be as good as the teacher using it. Therein lies the critical point of this whole talk since it is addressed to teachers. And now that we have finished considering some criteria for textbook evaluation, we must realize that the analysis can only reflect the expertise and training (or lack of training and expertise) of the teacher, coordinator, or chairman making the analysis, and, one selected, the textbook is dependent on the teacher, who must exploit it to its limits - and be assured that every text has its limitations. All need to be supplemented by additional exercises, drills, explanations, or reading material. And since classroom teaching is a full-time job, the classroom teacher does not want to take on another full-time job: preparing materials.

So sit down and ask yourself what your students need in terms of age level, proficiency, skills, and subject areas and evaluate a textbook in terms of its orientation and attention to the various skills and subject areas - Does it devote attention to all the skills? Does it treat all of the subject areas? Is there a sufficient number of exercises to give the students the kind of practice they truly need? Is there a teacher's manual? Does it guide or limit? Can the book be used without the students' heads buried inside...

You, the teacher, hold the key. You will find and exhibit the best and worst of any textbook - for, finally, you are the textbook.

---

1. Mackey, William F. Language Teaching Analysis. Longmans: London, 1965, p.332.
2. Anthony, Edward M. "Approach, Method, and Technique." Teaching English as a Second Language. (Harold B. Allen, Ed.) McGraw Hill: New York, 1965, pp. 93-97.
3. Ibid. p.94.
4. Ibid. p.95.
5. Sapir, Edward. Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech. Harcourt, Brace & World: New York, 1921, p.243.
6. Mackey, p.157.